

Under Construction but, Wide-Open for Recreation

Bond Update: Good Stewards

Sustainable Switches: Laundry Edition

Love of Nature: How one Couple's Love Story Turned into an 8+ Acre Gift

Sniffing Around: Conservation Dogs and Their Role in the Restoration of Ornate Box Turtles

Learn, Engage and Play *Programs, Volunteering, & Events:* 



09 Family Fun Night



10 Sustainability Series



Horses Helping Heroes



12 Mississippi Cruise & Field of Dreams



**I4** Mornings in the Garden



**15** Summer Skills



#### **HOURS OF OPERATION:**

Mon - Fri | 9 am - 4 pm Saturday | 10 am - 4 pm Sunday & Open Holidays | Noon - 4 pm Closed Sunday | DEC - FEB

**JESTER PARK OUTDOOR RECREATION & WELLNESS CENTER** 

**SUMMER HOURS:** (Memorial Day - Labor Day)

Thurs - Sat | 10 am - 4 pm Sunday, Memorial Day, & Labor Day | Noon - 4 pm

FALL & WINTER HOURS: (until May 28, 2023)

Saturday | 10 am - 4 pm Sunday & Open Holidays | Noon - 4 pm

# **HOLIDAYS CLOSED:**

Presidents' Day

Easter Day

Veterans Day

Thanksgiving Day

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day (Dec 23-26)

New Year's Day & New Year's Day Observed (Jan 1-2)

Polk County Conservation strives to host inclusive, accessible events and meetings that enable all individuals to participate. If you anticipate needing a modification due to a disability or have questions about accessibility, please contact us at 515-323-5300 or pccb\_info@polkcountyiowa.gov.



# BUT, WIDE-OPEN FOR RECREATION

You may see a few more large pieces of heavy equipment in Polk County Conservation parks this summer. That's because this year we have some very exciting construction projects kicking into high gear.

You'll see fast movement on creation of the Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake Park, installation of the all-weather tubing hill at Sleepy Hollow, and new restrooms, shelter houses and playgrounds popping up across the parks. Conservation is also using heavy equipment to clear out diseased or invasive trees, and stabilize stream banks that are badly eroding — all for the health of our local ecosystems. In the coming years, these exciting construction projects will no doubt, lead even more people outdoors.

Equally exciting is every other park, program or project that will be wide-open for you to enjoy now. This is the first summer the new Trestle to Trestle Trail bridge in Johnston will be open since 2019. You can meet the new live raptors and tour the Native America Indian Artifact Exhibit at Jester Park. And each month our team of dynamic educators will hold program series in parks all across the county. Your Polk County parks are humming with activity. Come be part of it all.

See you on the trails!

Richard Leopold

Director

Polk County Conservation

# Bond Updates

# 900D stewards

As part of Conservation's promise of transparency to the voters, this space in Nature News is dedicated to providing updates on projects — large and small — that are funded with bond dollars.



# Construction of Athene North Shore Recreation Area

Demolition is done! So this summer you'll see lots of heavy equipment at Easter Lake. From earthwork to building construction, the beachfront will transform into one of the most accessible parks in the country. The official opening is slated for spring 2024.



# Year-round tubing coming to Sleepy Hollow

Throughout the summer, crews will be working hard to install an artificial surface called Snowflex on the tubing hill. Yes, that means once installed the public can fly down the hill in the peak-heat of summer! The goal is to re-open Sleepy Hollow in late 2023.



# Critical park upgrades

Park and construction staff are running in high gear. At Jester Park the staff is installing new restrooms and shower houses at critical campsites, as well as replacing two shelter houses. Thomas Mitchell Park is getting a new playground.



# Ravine remediation effort at Yellow Banks Park

This summer, a contractor will begin work to repair the bed and banks of a ravine that runs between two ponds at Yellow Banks Park. They will first reshape the bed and banks. Then various sizes of rock, like crushed limestone, will be laid down to stabilize the foundation of the ravine. The effort will drastically slow erosion and protect the nearby hiking trail from future damage.





#### HOW ONE COUPLE'S LOVE STORY TURNED INTO AN 8+ ACRE GIFT

A country girl and a city boy fell in love, married, and found themselves in the lovely suburb of West Des Moines. Yet the country girl still longed for the greenery, fresh air and freedom of country life. In 1976, after much searching, an advertisement in the newspaper brought Fred and Carol Lockard to a forested acreage with a hayfield behind the house and Santiago Creek snaking through the hills and ravines beyond. The property bordered what would become the Chichaqua Valley Trail. This property has been their family home for the past forty-six years.

Carol's love of nature is seen through her documentation of the land. In 1979 she did an inventory of the property's flora and fauna for a college field biology class. Documentation continued through photos and notes. Sadly, several widespread species are now rare in the area: red fox, opossum, and raccoon; red headed woodpecker and brown creeper; garter snake, little brown snake, bull snake; and various frogs and toads.

When housing developments began popping up around the neighborhood eliminating trees and wildlife habitat, Fred and Carol became worried

about what would happen to this beloved haven. They looked to Polk County Conservation to step in as the caretakers. The Lockards generously donated 8.14 acres of forest, field, and creek, valued at \$280.000.

According to Fred, "I hope people remember that no one owns the land, we are just caretakers. If we don't preserve the natural world now, there won't be anything left of forest and wildlife for future generations to enjoy".



SCAN TO READ MORE



Fred and Carol Lockard (front, left) meeting with Polk County Conservation to make their donation of land official.

"I hope people remember that no one owns the land, we are just caretakers. If we don't preserve the natural world now, there won't be anything left of forest and wildlife for future generations to enjoy"

- FRED LOCKARD





conservation dogs & their role in the restoration of ornate box turtles

"The life of an Ornate Box Turtle is a risky life," said Drake University Professor of Environmental Science Dr. Keith Summerville. "Hatchlings only have about a one percent survival rate. Ninety-nine percent of all eggs will either fail to hatch or the hatchlings will be consumed by snakes, skunks, opossums, raccoons, hawks, and other predators."

Despite having a high hatchling mortality rate, the Ornate Box Turtle was once common across lowa and the Great Plains. They are now categorized as threatened statewide because natural predators are not the only thing threatening their survival. Due to habitat loss, farming, and land development their population has dramatically decreased.

To help conservation efforts, a group of Ornate Box Turtles were rehomed in 1998 from lowa City where a development project threatened their habitat, to the sandy soil of Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. Then again in 2004, more turtles were brought from lowa City with the goal of strengthening the central lowa population.

They originally needed to be kept in an outdoor enclosure that helped keep predators out and the turtles in. "Turtles are inherently philopatric meaning they tend to orient to where they are born. According to John Christensen's notes (the original facilitators of the move), the next day the turtles were all piled up in the southeast corner trying to walk back to lowa city," Summerville explained.

After a decade, the enclosure was taken down allowing the Ornate Box Turtles to move about their habitat. Throughout the years there have been efforts to track and record the turtles. More recently, these efforts have been revamped through a partnership between Polk County Conservation and Drake University.



Ecologist Cassie Cook examines an ornate box turtle located by a conservation dog.



Conservationists are working to find and monitor the turtles to better inform habitat management, get a clear picture of the population, and find out if they are a sustainable population.

Polk County Conservation Ecologist Cassie Cook said, "Our goal is to facilitate the restoration of a species that historically was here and should still be here. The next nearest location is in Iowa City, so having a strong population here in central lowa is our goal. They went away because of human influences and we want to remediate that."

To better monitor the turtles' movements, conservationists have been placing radio transmitters



Conservation scent detection dog, Willow, with her handler.

on turtles as they are located. In the last year, conservation scent detection dogs were employed to help find more turtles to equip with transmitters. Finding the turtles also allows staff to gather data on their size, sex, and age.

"We would like to preserve and maintain this population that has been reintroduced and give them the best habitat where they can procreate, increase in their numbers and remain a presence at Chichaqua," Cook said.



SCAN TO READ MORE ABOUT WILLOW THE CONSERVATION DOG



04 MAY

# May the Forest be with You

6:30-7:30 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 12+ | FREE | *Register by May 3* 

**04**MAY

# **Toddler Tales - Eggciting Eggs**

10-10:30 am Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 3-6 | FREE | *No registration required* 

O6 MAY

# **Great Garlic & Mustard Pesto Fest**

10 am-1 pm Jester Park All ages | FREE | *Register by Noon, May 5* 

HORSE WHISPERS
in the WOODS

A women's circle
of self-discovery
through the intuitive
and healing power
of horses.

Ages 21+ | Women Only

Registration Required
6 pm | \$35/person
May 11 & 18, June 1, July 6, Aug 10

**09**MAY

# Eco Bus Trip: Journey Back in Time to Jamesport

7:30 am-6 pm | Location TBD Ages: 12+ | \$110/person | *Register by April 25* 

II MAY

# Wild Night Life & Hike

8-9:30 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 5+ \$5/person | *Register by May 9* 

I2 MAY

# Catch-n-Croakers

8:30–10 pm Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, *Longhouse* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

I5 MAY

#### **Hike for Health**

9:30-10:30 am
Fort Des Moines Park, Shelter #3
Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by May 13* 

16 MAY

#### **Pony Tales**

11:30 am Jester Park Equestrian Center All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

16 MAY

# Women in the Woods with Wine - Raptors of Iowa

7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by May 15*  VOLUNTER NO MAY

## **Riverfest 2023**

8:30 am-1 pm Birdland Park All ages | FREE | *Register by Noon, May 18* 

20 MAY

# **Spring into Action**

10-Noon
Fort Des Moines Park
All ages | FREE | *Register by Noon, May 19* 



## Wild Pride - Canoeing

1–2:30 pm | Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Longhouse

Ages: 10+ | FREE | Register by May 19



# An Afternoon with Aldo Leopold

1–3 pm | Jester Park Nature Center All ages FREE | *No registration required* 

23 MAY

# **Sunset Yoga**

7:30-9 pm

Jester Park Nature Center

Ages 12+ | \$15/person | Register by May 21





# **FAMILY FUN NIGHT**

May 19, June 16, July 14, Aug 18
Outdoor Rec & Wellness Center

6-8 pm \$5.00/person FREE: children under 4 Registration Required

24 MAY

# **National Bee Day Celebration**

6-7 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by May 22* 

25 MAY

#### **Kayak Basics**

6-8 pm Outdoor Rec & Wellness Center Ages 16+ | \$20/person | *Register by May 23* 

OI JUN

# **Toddler Tales - Frogs**

10-10:30 am Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 3-6 | FREE | *No registration required* 

O2 JUN

#### **Fishing Basics**

10 am-Noon Yellow Banks Park, *Pond Parking Lot* Ages 5+ | FREE | *No registration required* 

O3 JUN

# **Shinrin Yoku**

10 am-Noon Brown's Woods, old parking lot Ages 7+ | \$15/person | Register by June 1, DETA,

**O3** 

## **Shinrin Yoku**

1-3 pm
Brown's Woods, old parking lot
Ages 12+ | \$15/person | Register by June 1



Jester Park Nature Center 6:30-7:30 pm | Ages: 12+ FREE | *Pre-Registration required* 

JUNE 6: Planting Native Register by June 5

AUG 1: Climate Change Register by July 30



# **Metro Mystery Float**

10 am-4 pm | Location TBD Ages: 12+ (w/adult) \$25/person | *Register by June 2* 



## **Eco-Bus Trip:** Western Iowa Wonders

7:30 am-5:30 pm Western Iowa Ages 12+ | \$100/person | *Register by May 31* 



#### **Lauridsen Skatepark Volunteer Days**

10 am-Noon | Lauridsen Skatepark All ages FREE | *Register by Noon, June 14* 



# JUNE 15 | 6-8 pm BUCKMILLER SCHWAGER

Jester Park Nature Center All ages | FREE Food vendor: ice cream



## **Native Prairie Day**

1-2:30 pm Yellow Banks, *Prairie View Shelter* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 



# **Archeology Artifacts**

10 am-Noon Yellow Banks Park, *Prairie View Shelter* Ages: 10+ | FREE | *No registration* 



# Nature Story Hour: Critter Camouflage

Noon-1 pm | Jester Park, *Shelter #5* All ages FREE | *No registration required* 

**09** JUN

# Picnic in your PJs

6-7:30 pm Yellow Banks Park, *Prairie View Shelter* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 



#### **Adult Summer Camp Retreat**

9 am-3:30 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 18+ | \$50/person | *Register by May 27* 





I5 JUN

#### **National Nature Photography Day Hike**

7:30-8:30 pm Yellow Banks Park, *Pond Parking Lot* Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by June 14*  2I JUN

#### **Nature Story Hour:** *Insect Safari*

Noon-1 pm Yellow Banks Park, *Prairie View Shelter* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

16 JUN

**OLUNTEER** 

#### **Prairie Production Plots**

9 am-Noon Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt All ages | FREE | *Register by Noon, June 15*  22 JUN

#### Princess Adventures - All About Birds

10-11 am | Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 4-6 \$5/person | *Register by June 20* 

I7 JUN

# **Pond Study**

10-11 am
Yellow Banks Park, *Pond Parking Lot*Ages: 3+ | FREE | *No registration required* 

24 JUN

# **Pony Tales**

11:30 am

Jester Park Equestrian Center

All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

20 JUN

#### **Hike for Health**

9:30-10:30 am
Easter Lake Park, *Shelter #4*Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by June 19* 

25 JUN

#### Wild Pride - Bees and Butterflies

1-2:30 pm Yellow Banks Park, *Prairie View Shelter* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

20 JUN

# Women in the Woods with Wine - Let's Go Camping

7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by June 18* 



#### **Sunset Yoga**

8-9:30 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages 12+

\$15/person | Register by June 24





28 JUN

# Nature Playdates - Fairy Houses

10:30-11:30 am Brown's Woods All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

**05** JUL

# Flora Fauna & History Hike

10 am-Noon Thomas Mitchell Park, *Pond Parking Lot* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

**06** 

## **Pony Tales**

11:30 am

Jester Park Equestrian Center

All ages | FREE | No registration required

**06** 

# **Toddler Tales - Busy Bees**

10-10:30 am Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 3-6 | FREE | *No registration required* 

O7 JUL

# **Prairie Production Plots**

9 am-Noon Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt All ages | FREE | *Register by Noon, July 6* 

O7

## Fireflies by Firelight

8:30-9:30 am
Thomas Mitchell Park, *Shelter #1*All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

I2 JUL

# Nature Playdates - Water Wonders

10:30-11:30 am

Thomas Mitchell Park, Pond Parking Lot All ages | FREE | No registration required

I3 JUL

# **Lauridsen Skatepark Volunteer Days**

10 am-Noon | Lauridsen Skatepark All ages

FREE | Register by Noon, June 12

I3 JUL

#### **Princess Adventures - Butterflies**

10-11 am | Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 4-6

\$5/person | Register by July 11

I7 JUL

# **Hike for Health**

9:30-10:30 am Thomas Mitchell Park, *Pond Parking Lot* Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by July 16* 



18 JUL

# Women in the Woods with Wine - Dutch Oven Cooking

7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by July 16* 

18 JUL

#### **Lunch and Lures**

11:30 am-1 pm Thomas Mitchell Park, *Pond Parking Lot* Ages: 5+ | FREE | *No registration required* 

I9 JUL

# Nature Story Hour: Snakes Alive!

Noon-1 pm
Fort Des Moines, *Shelter #3*All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 



JULY 20 | 6-8 pm

# **GRILL N'KAIN TRIO**

Jester Park Nature Center All ages | FREE Food vendor: ice cream

22 JUL

# **Leave No Trace**

10-11 am Thomas Mitchell Park, *Pond Parking Lot* All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 

22 JUL

#### **Mini Mindfulness Retreat**

10 am-Noon Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 12+ | \$15/person | *Register by July 20* 

**22** JUL

# Shinrin Yoku & Kayaking Combo

1–4 pm | Jester Park, *Shelter #5* Ages: 12+ \$30/person | *Register by July 20* 

24 JUL

#### **Sunset Yoga**

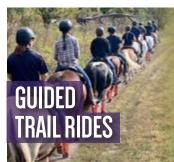
8-9:30 am Jester Park Nature Center Ages 12+ | \$15/person | *Register by July 22* 

26 JUL

# Nature Playdates - Life in a Log

10:30-11:30 am

Jester Park, *Shelter #5*All ages | FREE | *No registration required* 



JUNE: 2-17, 30 JULY: 1-22 | AUG: 11-26

FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS 9:30 am, 11 am, 2 pm

Jester Park Equestrian Center
Ages: 8+ | \$75/person
Pre-Registration Required

29 JUL

#### Creek Walk

10-11 am | Thomas Mitchell Park, Thomas Mitchell Park, *Shelter #1* Ages: 6+ | FREE | *No registration required* 

30 JUL

#### Wild Pride - Catch-n-Croakers

1-2:30 pm | Thomas Mitchell Park, Pond Parking Lot All ages | FREE | No registration required

O2 AUG

#### Nature Story Hour: Music & Movement

Noon-1 pm
Fort Des Moines, Shelter #3
All ages | FREE | No registration required



11 am - Noon | Jester Park Nature Center

Ages: 12+ | FREE | No registration required

MAY 2: Endangered Species

JUNE 6: Trees for Bees

JULY 11: Raptors of Iowa

AUG 1: Iowa: Portrait

of the Land





AUG

#### **Toddler Tales - Fish**

10-10:30 am Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 3-6 | FREE | No registration required

06 AUG

#### Wild Misconceptions

2-3 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages 10+ | FREE | Register by Aug 5



# **AUGUST 3** | 6-8 pm **JOSHUA SINCLAIR**

Jester Park Nature Center All ages | FREE Food vendor: ice cream

09 AUG

10

AUG

# **Lunch and Lures**

11:30 am-1 pm Fort Des Moines, Shelter #1 Ages: 5+ | FREE | No registration required

# **Prairie Production Plots**

9 am-Noon Chichagua Bottoms Greenbelt All ages | FREE | Register by Noon, Aug 3



# S'mores at Sunset

7-9 pm Outdoor Rec & Wellness Center All ages | \$5/person | Register by Aug 9

#### The Magic of Nature

10-11 am Jester Park Nature Center



# **Adult Summer Camp Retreat**

9 am-3:30 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages: 18+ | \$50/person | Register by July 29



Ages: 3-6 | FREE | Register by Aug 2



#### **Insect Hunt**

10-11 am | Fort Des Moines, Shelter #3 All ages FREE | No registration required



# **Ology Hike**

1-3 pm | Mally's Park Shelter Ages: 5+ FREE | No registration required



#### **Pony Tales**

11:30 am Jester Park Equestrian Center All ages | FREE | No registration required I5 AUG

# Women in the Woods with Wine - Sticks and Stones

7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center Ages 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by Aug 14* 

I5 AUG

## Eco-Bus Trip: On Safari!

7:30 am-7 pm Omaha, NE All ages | \$120/person | *Register by Aug 1* 

I7 AUG

# Lauridsen Skatepark Volunteer Days

10 am-Noon | Lauridsen Skatepark All ages

FREE | Register by Noon, Aug 16

I9 AUG

#### **Shinrin Yoku**

9-11 am
Fort Des Moines, *Shelter #3*Ages 12+ | \$15/person | *Register by Aug 17* 

2I AUG

#### **Hike for Health**

9:30-10:30 am Brown's Woods

Ages: 10+ | FREE | Register by Aug 20

2I AUG

#### **Sunset Yoga**

7-8:30 pm Jester Park Nature Center Ages 12+ | \$15/person | *Register by Aug 19* 

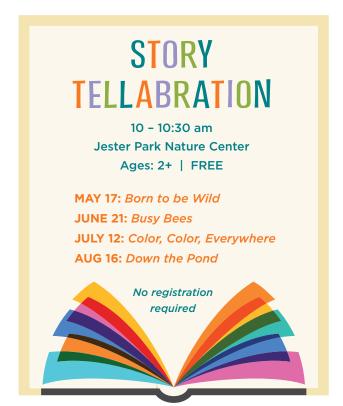
27 AUG

# Wild Pride - Fishing

1-2:30 pm | Fort Des Moines Park,

Shelter #1

All ages | FREE | No registration required



30 AUG

#### **Full Blue Moon Hike**

8-9 pm | Thomas Mitchell Park, *Pond*Parking Lot

All ages | FREE | No registration required

3I AUG

# **Geocache for Trail Mix**

5:30-7 pm Fort Des Moines, *Shelter #3* 

Ages: 10+ | \$5/family | *Register by Aug 29* 





CONSERVATION

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- 1. Beaver Creek Greenbelt
- 2. Brown's Woods
- 3. Carney Marsh
- 4. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
- 5. Chichagua Valley Trail
- 6. Easter Lake Park
- 7. Eagle Roost Wildlife Area
- 8. Engeldinger Marsh
- 9. Fort Des Moines Park
- 10. Fourmile Creek Greenway
- 11. Gay Lea Wilson Trail
- 12. Great Western Trail
- 13. High Trestle Trail
- 14. Jester Park
- 15. Lauridsen Skatepark
- 16. Mally's Park
- 17. Mark C. Ackelson Trail
- 18. Oralabor Gateway Trail
- 19. Strasser Woods
  State Preserve
- 20. Sycamore Trails
- 21. Thomas Mitchell Park
- 22. Trestle to Trestle Trail
- 23. Yellow Banks Park